

ELI WHITNEY AND THE COTTON GIN 37

to make a table knife to match the others of a broken set. As a boy of fifteen or sixteen, during the War of Independence, he was supplying the neighborhood with hand-made nails and various other articles. Though he had not been a particularly apt pupil in the schools, he conceived the ambition of attending college; and so, after teaching several winters in rural schools, he went to Yale. He appears to have paid his own way through college by the exercise of his mechanical talents. He is said to have mended for the college some imported apparatus which otherwise would have had to go to the old country for repairs. "There was a good mechanic spoiled when you came to college," he was told by a carpenter in the town. There was no "Sheff" at Yale in those days to give young men like Whitney scientific instruction; so, defying the bent of his abilities, Eli went on with his academic studies, graduated in 1792, at the age of twenty-seven, and decided to be a teacher or perhaps a lawyer.

Like so many young New Englanders of the time, Whitney sought employment in the South. Having received the promise of a position in South Carolina, he embarked at New York, soon after his graduation, on a sailing vessel bound for